2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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what took place, informants were anxious to point this out. They also admitted that its successful carrying out depended on several factors which no longer operated. The former Ngoni households with a number of servants and nursemaids were only to be found in the families of the Paramount and subordinate chiefs. The rigid separation of the girl from her own family at marriage was no longer usual in the central kingdom where Ngoni marriages often took place in the same village, and where daughters of important men stayed in their fathers' villages at marriage instead of leaving.

In Ngoni households family sleeping and eating arrangements depended not upon the small individual family but on the extended family group and on the boys' dormitory (*laweni*). As a general rule small children slept with their mother in her hut, but when her husband was sleeping with her it was considered wrong to have any but very young children in the hut. Boys up to the age of seven, when they went to the *laweni*, and girls up to their marriage, usually slept in the hut of a mother or a widowed sister of their father.

Each wife, after she had been 'shown the hearth-stones', had a granary built for her by her husband or her husband's brothers where she stored grain. On the rafters in her hut, and in pots and jars on the enclosed verandah, and in pits dug under the eaves, she stored other foodstuffs, such as chillies, beans and sweet potatoes. From these supplies, supplemented by fresh 'relish' from the gardens or bush, she cooked daily meals which she served to her husband, and which her younger sons in the *laweni* fetched to eat there, while she ate with her young children. Her husband's meals and the older boys' meals were taken in company with the male members of his kinship group and other villagers at the men's meeting-place by the gate of the kraal. His wife sent his food by a child in a covered basket with the small pot of relish on top. The publicity of the men's eating habits made them critical among their fellows of their wives' cooking, and this was a strong incentive among Ngoni wives to maintain a high standard of cooking. In addition to sending food to her husband, an Ngoni wife was expected to send a basket of food now and then to her father-in-law, or to any of her brothers-in-law who had assisted her to mend a roof or build a granary.

Within a wife's hut, not only food but other possessions, both personal and household, were stored. Clothes for daily and ceremonial use; mats for sleeping on and for drying grain; pots for water, cooking, and beer-brewing; ornamental jars for storing beans; baskets for carrying grain; food baskets embroidered with beads—the Ngoni wife of good family expected to possess all these and to keep them carefully. Many of them she brought with her on her marriage or had given her later as presents by her own parents and family, in order that she might not appear poor or of low rank among her husband's people. For the same reason, she

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reminding the spirits that all depended on them. There was no tone of scolding in the words but a respectful plea for attention and help.

Alas O Paramount,
Alas O Father,
Why do you refuse us?
What do you say about your child?
We say we are your people,
Alas O Paramount.

In prayers for rain the same form of address was used with the three parts of the prayer. The ancestral spirits addressed were those of the line of the Paramounts, since the needs of the whole country were involved. The beast chosen for the offering to the spirits was a black one with no white markings, and in place of the sick person's name, the need for rain was mentioned. In the account given by Mlonyeni Jere (quoted in the first chapter of Part IV) he used this formula, mentioning the names, presenting the cow, and then asking the ancestral spirits to tell UMkulumqango how greatly they were troubled through lack of rain.

The ritual of sacrificing to the spirits

The essential equipment in the ritual of sacrificing was the spear with which the beast was killed; baskets, both the wide winnowing basket (*lichero*) and the food basket (*usengwa*); the wooden dish (*ngewembe*) on which the meat was placed; and the gourd cups for beer. These have been mentioned already in several contexts as the sacrificial vessels or ritual objects connected with the ancestor cult and kept in the hut of the woman who was guardian of a particular ancestral spirit. In the northern kingdom one of the Nhlane clan who carried out the ritual for sacrifices to UNdina Nhlane at Hoho said that in the hut of UNtani Nzima who died in Swaziland, but whose house had continued, was a spear, a black cloth for rain-making and a wooden meat dish. These were kept on the right-hand side at the back of the hut, and no one passing by could stand erect; he had to bend his back and head 'as men do when passing the *inkosi*'. Since the coming of the missions these had been thrown away.

In the central kingdom I saw in several houses this collection of ritual vessels. There was always a spear, a food basket, one or more gourds for beer, and one or more of the wide, flat, winnowing baskets on which uncooked flour was carried and which was used for meat if there was no wooden dish. These were kept at the back of the hut hanging on the wall, above the place where sacrificial meat was laid.

The first stage of the ritual sacrifice was killing and flaying the beast. It was killed either in the kraal or just outside the fence, with a thrust from the spear, or more than one if necessary, by some member of the leading clan. At the time of the sacrifice when Bambo Mangs was ill

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woman had her home. The other was the 'gate'[1] of the kraal at the opposite end of the enclosure to the 'big house'. The name by which this 'gate' was known applied also to the space on each side of the gap in the kraal fence through which the cattle went out and came in—a gap which was closed at night with heavy poles. Here at the gate the men of the village sat by day, ate their meals brought to them by children from their wives' huts, talked, received strangers, pursued their crafts, and supervised the return of the cattle in the evenings.

In and around the main huts within the tall reed fences, the life of a Ngoni household went on. Some of the huts were rectangular, others round. All had a veranda built up above the ground-level and shaded by the house roof. The back parts of the veranda were often enclosed with mats to make additional storage space. In old Ngoni households the open space around the hut was kept swept and mudded and polished like a floor, so that people could sit there in comfort and cleanliness as well as on the veranda. Near the house was one or more little reed platforms about five feet above the ground, where kitchen utensils, gourds and vegetables were laid to dry, and which were used to sit under as shelter from the sun in the hot months. Large and small wooden pounding mortars and poles, clay pots of every size and shape, mats for sleeping and for drying grain, baskets for many purposes, wooden food trays and spoons, gourds of several shapes, formed the traditional household equipment always to be seen outside and around the hut, as well as inside.

In each household, within the main hut, there were two places of particular significance. One was by the two main door-posts at the entrance. These posts with the hollow for the fireplace in the centre of the floor divided the hut into a right-hand and left-hand side—the men's side and the

[1] and [2] A short list of the vernacular terms for some these common Ngoni place-names is given at end of the book.

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8. A well-filled grain store

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[facing page 48]

9. Winnowing

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not enough milk, or was unable to suckle the child, or was ill or died. If a woman died in or just after childbirth, and the child survived, it might be suckled by the paternal grandmother or by another co-wife of the dead woman, but as a rule they resorted to artificial feeding, and often used it to supplement breast feeding. The father of the child took the food pipe of a beast recently killed, washed it and dried it, and handed it over to the women to rub with fat until it was soft and pliable. One end was then tied tightly to close it, it was filled with warm cow's milk, and the other end was tied loosely so that the child could just suck through it. It was kept well washed with warm water, and many infants were brought up successfully with this 'bottle'.

The babies were also given very thin gruel made of millet or maize flour, and curds and whey beaten up together. This was put in a very small gourd, decorated with drawings, with a spout to pour from, and a cover to keep flies and dust out.

Weaning

Studies of weaning in different cultures lay emphasis on the traumatic shock of separation from the mother, not only in terms of being refused the breast, but also of being removed to sleep elsewhere than beside the mother, and perhaps being sent away to stay with another relative.

In the Ngoni pattern of nurse-girl care and of supplementary feeding, especially after the first few months, it might seem that the actual weaning was less of a shock than in cultural situations where the baby was with the mother all day, carried about by her and never refused the breast if it cried. Ngoni women, however, and men too, all asserted that weaning was a shock to the child, even if it happened at two years old.

The reasons for this shock were partly that it was done all in one morning at one fell swoop, and partly that the child was sent away from the mother at night. The same nurse girl looked after it all day, but now took it more often to

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surroundings were described in Chapter I, but in spite of some repetition I have given a fuller description here to set the stage for the earlier years of a young Ngoni child. In several respects a casual observer, looking at the external appearance of the hut and the objects round it, might fail to distinguish between them and almost any Nyasaland village. Many of the household objects were indeed the same as those used by other Nyasaland peoples. But there was more elaboration about Ngoni huts and compounds; they were as a rule kept in an orderly and clean condition; and there was cultural significance about some of the features of Ngoni households mentioned here and in Chapter I which was not found elsewhere.

To the small child taken to his grandmother's hut at weaning, the space within the fence of her compound was full of interest. There was the hut itself which might be the 'great hut' of the village or one of those known as the 'right hand' and 'left hand' huts. It was generally circular, with interior walls some seven to eight feet high, with a conical roof of tightly packed grass neatly trimmed at the edges and decorated with cows' horns from the peak downwards in four lines. Inside the hut framing the doorway were the two main door-posts, solid and polished with much handling. Four posts in the middle of the floor went up to the rafters and supported cross-bars and a light platform on which gourds, herbs and green vegetables were dried. Under this platform, in the centre of the hut, was the hollow place for the fire and the three rounded hearthstones on which pots were balanced when cooking took place there. Against the back wall of the hut was a slightly raised platform in which were several small hollows for the round bottomed pots holding water, or grain or beans. Surrounding the entire hut was a raised veranda some four to five feet wide, shaded by the projecting roof, and generally fenced in all round the back, thus making extra storage space. All round the front of the hut was a well-swept space, mudded and polished in

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sieves for straining beer or water poured through ashes to make salt. These lay around all day if they were being used, and were periodically scrubbed and put on the rack to dry, and at night stacked tidily in the veranda. In the day-time sleeping-mats of finely woven fibre were brought out into the sun, and so were skins and cloths used as coverings at night. Some of the Ngoni used curved wooden headrests as pillows often carved at the ends with animals' heads to fascinate a small child.

On the polished space in front of the hut were laid from time to time mats on which sprouting millet for making beer was dried, or partly pounded damp maize. A young child was sometimes told to keep the fowls and dogs off these mats. These animals and often small kids, wandered and pecked and scratched and quarrelled inside the fence all day, and young children chased them.

Beyond the fence lay other fenced compounds grouped round the cattle kraal, and beyond the village buildings lay patches of woodland, grass pastures, cultivated 'gardens', and water-holes and streams. Going with the mother or grandmother or a nurse girl or helper to fetch water, or work in the gardens was an expedition for young children which they delighted in.

In these village surroundings there were some places forbidden to young children, who were corrected by everyone with smacks and stern reproofs until they learned to keep away. One such forbidden place was the kraal gateway where the men sat and talked and ate. No woman until she had passed the menopause was allowed to cross over in front of the gateway lest she injure the cattle. If therefore children strayed down there, younger women did not like to go and fetch them back, as the men always grumbled if women went there lest they should harm the cattle. It was nevertheless a place that had a great attraction for boys of five to seven years old, because they found their fathers there and the herd boys. The boys in this age-group of five to seven showed

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351 old Ngoni families, and shining like marble, as did the hut and veranda floors. On this polished space, or else on the
574 veranda, the child's grandmother sat when callers had been announced, and from that vantage-point she could command the entrance through the surrounding fence, and agree to receive callers who had asked for admittance. Also in front
417 of the hut was another drying platform which was large
343 enough to offer shelter from the sun in hot weather; the
[235] dovecot where the 'royal pigeons' lived if the household was
[554] of the royal clan or distinguished enough to aspire to keeping pigeons. Off to one side was a hut for the goats at night and another, hoisted up on a platform, for the poultry. On the other side of the main hut were the grain stores, built up on low platforms. The maize stores were up to ten feet high and ten feet in diameter in these big households, and well-to-
[556] do women would have four or five of them bulging with maize cobs. There were smaller circular mudded bins for ground-nuts and millet. Behind the hut were two or three small huts where some of the helpers slept, and one of them
351 was generally a kitchen hut. Piles of wood, and bundles of
[284] thatching grass bound neatly with bark rope, were stacked against the fence.

351 There were innumerable objects around the compound of
412 interest to the small child prowling about. Two or three tall wooden pounding mortars, so heavy that they could not be lifted and had to be trundled on their circular base from one place to another, stood near the kitchen hut, or were moved to the front if the women pounding had to watch children there. There were much smaller mortars for pounding ground-nuts, kept when not in use in the fenced-in veranda; and one or more large flat stones for grinding finger millet and bulrush millet. Baskets were of all sizes and shapes
351 from the small round food basket with a lid in which father's
415 food was carried to the kraal gate, to the wide shallow winnowing baskets, the deep round carrying baskets some as large as two feet in diameter, and the porous baskets used as

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Maize, the Ngoni staple cereal which had replaced the tall millet they had formerly preferred, was stored on the cob in the grain stores which were described in Chapter IV. Women whose husbands could afford to hire labour to work in their fields often had three or four large grain stores, and their presence in the compound conferred importance on their owners. Inside the hut were earthenware jars of beans, cowpeas, bulrush millet, clarified fat and butter, dried chillies, while from the rafters hung bunches of herbs and dried green spinach. Some of the jars were polished a shining black, others had a blue or green glaze on them. It was a Ngoni girl's ambition to go to her new home when married with a good array of storage pots, baskets, mats, spoons, stirring sticks, and a wooden meat-dish. This would show her in-laws that she was industrious and intended to have a high standard of household management in her new home.

Varieties of food and their preparation

Ngoni women prided themselves on feeding their households well, both in variety, quantity and quality. Although they could rely on helpers to work in the gardens and to do some of the preparing of food before cooking, they always managed their own supplies and provided a variety of menus, and showed that they could cook well themselves and instruct others.

Ngoni girls clustered round the fire when a special dish was being prepared. They watched every movement of their mother as she lifted one pot off the fire and put another on, measured out water in a spoon to add to the sauce, stirred the maize porridge strongly and evenly to get rid of lumps and bubbles, washed each stirring stick in a pot of water before using it again.

There was variety in the dishes served from day to day in big Ngoni households, usually in the form of a main dish of cereal with side dishes of broth and vegetables and less often of meat or chicken. The main dish was served in the

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round covered food basket, the side dishes in small covered earthenware bowls. Among the traditional Ngoni dishes learned by girls were the following:

Gruel made of cow's milk and maize flour (for young children).
Whole maize boiled with beans and round peas.
Sweet potatoes boiled, peeled and mashed with tomatoes.
Beans and finger millet flour cooked separately and then stirred together.
Pumpkins cooked with ground-nut paste.
Ground-nut flour cooked with scraps of meat.
Whole tall millet pounded with ground-nuts.
Pot-roast chicken with tomatoes, onions and ground-nuts.

In Ngoni households meat when cooked in large quantities, not just as broth made from bones and titbits, was served on a special wooden meat-dish, round or oblong with rounded ends, and supported on three sturdy legs. This meat-dish was an integral part of the equipment of every 'true Ngoni' household, and, like the French housewife's omelet pan, was after use wiped clean and polished with clarified fat. The outside of these meat-dishes was often decorated with 'poker work' designs by the maker, and such decorated and shining meat-dishes were treasured as heirlooms. Other, but rare, heirlooms were hammered brass pots with a flat bottom and turned over edge, of the pattern known in India as *dekchies*. The Ngoni women who owned them declared they had been brought by their ancestors from the south.

All the extra fat when a beast was killed was sent to the women of the 'house' in whose herd it was, and this fat was cooked until it was clarified, and then stored. Butter was made by shaking milk in a gourd, and it was also clarified for keeping. Formerly milk curds were made daily by the senior women and kept to mature in a jar before being eaten. Only in a few Ngoni households was this still done.

Beer was made on special occasions when the women had

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

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● 415

1. Storing finger millet. The untidily thatched building on the right is a dormitory for boys

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415
342
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2. A queen brewing beer. It is only important people who own oil drums

NGONI

[Facing P. 208]

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

than either of these two drinks, and the drinking of it is essentially a social event. The kind of beer brewed is made from maize, sorghum, and finger millet. It is brewed by women, the process lasting about a week. The beer can be drunk at any time during the week, but it is not regarded as truly beer until after the brewing process has been completed. It remains good to drink for about three days, after which it becomes too sour. About 20 to 30 gallons of beer are brewed at a time. The beer can be sold, used to provide refreshment for participants in some ceremony or other, offered in return for labour or other services, or else just drunk for its own sake. In each case the presence of beer in the village acts as a magnet attracting people from other villages. Beer that is sold is of economic importance as it is the principal way in which women raise funds for themselves. In connexion with a ceremony of some kind, the attraction of the beer is secondary in general to that exerted by the ceremony itself. The provision of beer in return for utilitarian services we shall discuss later. It is in the pattern of behaviour adopted when beer is drunk for its own sake that we can see reflected the structure of social action at the village level.

Beer is stored in earthenware jars of about 7 gallons capacity. A calabash-gourd cup is used to ladle the beer into earthenware bowls holding about 4 pints; from these the beer is drunk. When the beer is ready for drinking, the friendly fellow villagers of the man whose wife has brewed come to the beer-hut, which is usually the woman's kitchen, and the owner of the beer drinks the first jar with them. The procedure with each jar is that the owner of the beer gives the jar to someone, almost invariably a man, who becomes known as the divider of the beer, and who calls on someone junior to him to act as the dispenser of the beer. The dispenser sits on the ground and fills up the bowls from the jar under the instruction of the divider of the beer, and then takes them, or points them out to, the people to whom the divider wishes to give the beer. Thus the beer is given away in jars by the owner of the beer to the dividers of the beer, and is then divided into bowlfuls, and given by the dividers to yet other people. The owners of the bowlfuls drink some and pass on the bowls so that other people may drink. Each time these gifts of beer of different quantities are made they are acknowledged by the recipient in the form of a praise, consisting of the syllable *yo* followed by the descent-name of the giver. This is also done when a bowl or a jar is finished, so that when the last bowl of a jar is finished the owner of the bowl is praised, then the divider of the beer, and finally the owner of the beer. The

/7 cont'd/

IV

353 Inside the house most of the household possessions are kept on the floor. At the back of the hut are the pots of the household, 415 large ten-gallon beer brewing pots, smaller pots for holding the beer when brewed, bowls for drinking beer, wide mouthed pots for washing, small deep pots for cooking porridge and relish, waterpots, ornamented gourds for strong beer, and simple gourd cups for water. With them are also enamel saucepans, basins, mugs, and dishes, and sometimes a kettle. Only the very prosperous have glassware or [511] china crockery.

323 Pottery is made by women only, and it is not a skill that every [462] woman possesses. In a village there are usually one or two women who make pots, while a few women have a reputation for good pottery that attracts customers to them from a wider neighbourhood. [489] Pots are usually sold for money, salt, or in return for bringing twice [415] the amount of clay needed to make the article required. Petrol and paraffin tins as well as enamel and tinware are also used.

For pot making, clay is chosen from an anthill or marsh, and soaked for three days before being kneaded. The pot is made from a coil, and after smoothing it is ornamented. It is burnt for one day, and may be given a dull black colour by being rubbed with the leaves [824] of the mbwabwa tree.

285 Hung on the walls of the hut or lying on the floor are the [353] different baskets owned by the household. Baskets are made by men, [467] and during the dry season when there is much road repair work to be [491] done it is common to see three or four men spending their evenings after work on the road in making baskets. These baskets are often [493] made to order, but the occasional hawker is seen. Large cuboid baskets are used for transporting mealies and grain, shallow baskets of two feet in diameter are used for winnowing flour, and small hemispherical baskets take the place of plates for /8/ porridge. These latter are frequently made in pairs, tied together with a string of beads, so that the second basket acts as a lid for the first and keeps

/8 cont'd/

285 the porridge inside warm. For straining beer, a special wide mesh basket is used, either conical or hemispherical in shape. Round and rectangular baskets of various sizes, with flat lids, are also found [482] and are used for carrying small quantities of food on a journey.

In former times, wooden plates were used, but these are now 415 very rare. Wooden spoons are still made and used, and large flat 417 porridge stirrers, with geometrical ornamentation, are common. [531] Wooden hemispherical pats, with a handle, are used for smoothing cooked porridge.

412 At the back of the hut, or on the verandah outside, are the pestle and mortar used for reducing maize and other cereals to flour. Mortars range in height from one to four feet, the smaller mortars being used by children or for crushing ground-nuts. They are usually of about one foot in diameter, and are made from single blocks of wood, usually from Afzilia quanzensis or Monotes trees. The inside of the block is hollowed out to leave a receptacle for the maize that is nearly as deep as the mortar is high. The only decoration is [531] a ridge of wood about an inch wide left encircling the base three or four inches from the ground. Pestles are undecorated cylinders of wood, made from Terminalia sericea or Kigelia pinnata trees. They may be as much as six feet long, and range in thickness from four [504] inches down to the half-inch pestles used by young children playing at pounding.

The hard residue of maize that cannot be reduced to flour by pounding is ground between two stones, and these grinding stones are also kept in the hut. Not every woman has her own grindstones [426] or her own pestle and mortar, and these objects are loaned and borrowed within the village.

Most huts contain some form of chair or stool, but these are 352 sometimes very small indeed, standing only two inches off the ground. Petrol boxes are used to sit on, and deck chairs, known in the vernacular as "sleeping chairs," are common. Carpenters make [463] a small folding chair that is fairly common. European upright chairs, basket chairs and Morris chairs are sometimes seen, but these are not made locally.